

# The Swedish Social Services Act

## **Preamble**

The Social Services Act was enacted on 1 January 1982. Since then, it has been amended several times. New regulations have been introduced and old ones have been removed. However, the general aims and fundamental democratic principles of the Social Services remain the same. On 1 January 2002, the Social Services Act was restructured, and new regulations were added. The Act is now divided into chapters, which makes it easier to search through.

**This publication tells you what your rights are, and what assistance you are entitled to from your municipal authorities under the Social Services Act.**

## **The most important changes in the new Social Services Act**

- ☐ You have greater rights to appeal decisions about assistance
- ☐ The Social Services must always formulate a care plan for children transferred to alternative homes
- ☐ Crime victims and their relatives should receive support and assistance
- ☐ New regulations regarding fees for elderly and disabled care (applies from 1 July 2002)
- ☐ Stricter supervision of the Social Services

## **Who can obtain help from the Social Services Act?**

Everyone may need help and support from the Social Services at one time or another. The Social Services Act contains regulations regarding your right to financial and social assistance, and regarding the municipal authorities' duties towards residents of the municipality. The support and help initiatives that you are entitled to under the Social Services Act are called *assistance*.

According to the Social Services Act, the municipal authorities have special responsibility for certain groups:

- ☐ Children and adolescents
- ☐ People with drug and alcohol addictions
- ☐ Elderly people
- ☐ People with functional disabilities
- ☐ People caring for relatives
- ☐ Crime victims

All services provided under the Social Services Act are based on free choice and autonomy. These services must be adapted to your individual circumstances and your desire to change your social situation. The assistance provided to you by the Social Services must be of high quality and carried out

by staff with the appropriate training and experience. If you do not receive the support and assistance you want and have requested, you may appeal the municipal authorities' decision. If you are dissatisfied with the treatment you receive, with the quality of a service, or with a decision, you should begin by contacting the supervisors and public officials in your municipality. However, you can also contact the County Administrative Board (*länsstyrelsen*), which is the supervisory agency for the Social Services.

### **Who is responsible for the Social Services?**

According to the Social Services Act, the municipal authorities are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the residents of a municipality receive the support and assistance they need.

The Social Services are governed by the Social Services Act and other laws. A variety of committees within the municipality may be responsible for the Social Services. The Municipal Council (*kommunfullmäktige*) decides which politically appointed committees are responsible for the work of the Social Services. For instance, the Social Services child welfare activities may be administered by a child care and youth committee, a social welfare board or a district committee. Similarly, the Social Services elder care may be administered by a care committee, a social welfare board or a district committee.

### **The Social Services. general responsibilities towards you**

#### **Social and financial security for everyone**

Everyone who lives in Sweden should confidently be able to turn to the Social Services in their home municipality for support and assistance. The basis for the provisions of the Social Services Act is that all citizens are of equal value and have the same right to social and financial security, care and assistance. Under the Social Services Act, each municipality is free to organise the work of the Social Services according to local conditions. However, each citizen is guaranteed a *reasonable standard of living* under the Social Services Acts provision regarding the right to assistance.

#### **Duty to document**

The Social Services have a duty to document all the administration of individual cases. This duty regarding documentation ensures that your case is processed according to law and procedural fairness. The documentation should indicate what decisions are made, the grounds for the decision, and what type of assistance you receive.

In addition to the social services provided at a municipal level, social service activities may also be organised by private individuals, foundations, companies or associations. Such services may include care and treatment for alcohol and drug abusers, elder care or disabled care, or sheltered housing. These independent organisations also have a duty to document your case. The documentation must be prepared with respect for your integrity. You should be informed of the notes that are made regarding you and your case. If you feel that something written about you is wrong or demeaning, this should be noted in your personal file. You have the right to read all the information in any personal files on you compiled by municipal or independently run social services. You have the right to read, copy or write down any information in your personal files, if it relates to you.

## **Confidentiality**

All the staff of the Social Services are sworn to professional secrecy. This also applies to the staff of independently run services. This means that the staff and politicians working for the social services may not pass on verbal information about you that is of a personal or sensitive nature.

Neither may the Social Services divulge written material regarding you or your case to other authorities or individuals. An exception may be made to this rule if you give your personal authorisation for such information to be divulged, or if the Social Services are legally obliged to supply information on you.

## **The right to appeal**

From the 1 January 2002, you have the right to appeal decisions about assistance, through a procedure known as administrative appeal (*förvaltningsbesvär*). *An administrative appeal means:*

- ☐ that the County Administrative Court determines both the legal issues of your case and arrives at a suitable decision for you
- ☐ that the County Administrative Court may annul the decision of the municipal authorities in favour of a new decision
- ☐ that the municipal authorities must immediately implement the new decision

Under the new Social Services Act, the right to appeal applies both to decisions about financial assistance towards living costs, and decisions about other types of assistance, e.g. support, care, treatment or home help services. This change in the Act was made to improve the legal rights of everyone who requires help from the Social Services. This is a return to the regulations that applied before 1 January 1998.

If the Social Services completely or partly refuse your application for assistance, you have the right to receive the decision in writing. You also have the right to receive an explanation for the decision. The Social Services must provide you with information on how to appeal the decision. You can also obtain help from the Social Services in writing your appeal. If the court grants your appeal and the municipal authorities do not carry out what the court has ordered, the County Administrative Board (*länsstyrelsen*) may order the municipal authorities to carry out the court's orders. If the municipal authorities still do not carry out the orders, the municipal authorities may be fined by the County Administrative Board.

## **The right to assistance**

In order to determine your right to assistance, the Social Services must contact an investigation. This investigation is performed with your help and, if necessary, with the collaboration of other parties. The Social Services may not contact other authorities or private individuals unless you agree to it.

If you are entitled to assistance, the services provided to you must guarantee you a reasonable standard of living. You may be entitled to assistance both for your upkeep and for other living requirements, e.g. care or homebased support and assistance. The assistance you receive must be organised so as to maximise your possibilities of leading an independent life.

You are not entitled to assistance if you are able to meet your own needs or get them met through other means.

### **Financial assistance**

The Swedish Parliament (*Riksdagen*) has decided that financial assistance (also known as social security or income support) shall be granted for reasonable expenses for:

- ☐ food
- ☐ clothes and shoes
- ☐ play and leisure time
- ☐ consumable goods
- ☐ health and hygiene
- ☐ daily newspapers, telephone costs and television license.

Each year, the Government establishes standard levels for these costs, which apply throughout Sweden. These cost levels are referred to as the national standard (*riksnorm*). The Government decides how much money each household is entitled to according to the national standard. A larger sum may be granted if there are special grounds for it, for instance if you have special dietary requirements for medical reasons. The Social Services may also grant you a sum that is below the national standard, if there are special grounds for doing so.

The right to financial assistance also covers reasonable costs for:

- ☐ accommodation
- ☐ household electricity
- ☐ work-related travel
- ☐ home insurance
- ☐ membership in trade unions and unemployment benefit funds.

No national standards have been defined for these costs. Instead, the Social Services must evaluate your individual needs and costs, taking into account your actual costs in comparison to what a low-income earner would normally be able to afford. The general level of costs for accommodation, household electricity and work-related travel in your home municipality should also be taken into account in this evaluation.

You may also apply for financial assistance for other long- or short-term needs, such as dental care, medical care, glasses, travel or funeral expenses. From 1 January 2002, the rejection of applications for such financial assistance may be appealed through an administrative appeal.

Even if you are not entitled to financial assistance, the Social Services *may* grant you assistance if there are grounds for it. This may be assistance towards the costs of rehabilitation, education programmes that fall outside the Government grant system or other forms of support and assistance. Decisions about such extra assistance may not be appealed through an administrative appeal.

### **The Social Services may impose requirements on you**

According to the provisions of the Social Services Act regarding the right to assistance, the Social

Services may impose certain requirements on you. If you are fit to work, you must seek employment. If you turn down an offer of work or other initiatives proposed to you by the employment services or the municipal authorities, you may lose your right to financial assistance for your upkeep.

If you have savings in the bank or other financial assets, you must use these resources to support yourself until you are deemed to be entitled to financial assistance. The Social Services may make additional requirements of three groups of social security recipients:

- ☐ people under 25 years of age
- ☐ people over 25 years of age who need to improve their skills for specific reasons
- ☐ students who are enrolled in educational programmes financed through study allowance etc., who require social security during a break in their studies.

If you belong to any of these groups, the Social Services may ask you to take part in occupational schemes or other skills-enhancing activities. If you refuse, you may lose your entitlement to financial assistance, or the sum you receive may be reduced. However, the Social Services must consult with the employment services before deciding this. Such decisions may also be appealed through an administrative appeal.

### **Repayment of money granted by the Social Services**

If you are granted financial assistance, the Social Services may demand that you pay back the money in the following circumstances:

- ☐ if the money was granted as an advance for a benefit or compensation (e.g. sickness benefit, pension or housing benefit) received
- ☐ if you are involved in a labour conflict
- ☐ if you have been unable to access your wages, savings or assets because of circumstances beyond your control. For instance, you may not be able to withdraw your money from the bank because of strikes or technical problems.

The written decision issued by the Social Services regarding your financial support should indicate whether the money is repayable, and should also clearly state the reasons for this.

You may also be required to repay money to the Social Services if you have been paid more money than you were entitled to. For instance, you may have received too much rent subsidy. The written decision should clearly indicate that the sum is repayable, and should also indicate repayment instalments and a payment deadline.

### **What if you give false information?**

If you have given false information regarding your financial circumstances, or have otherwise caused the Social Services to pay you money that you were not entitled to, or to pay you more money than you were entitled to, you may be required to pay back the money. The Social Services may also report you to the police if you are suspected of deliberately supplying false information.

It is important for you to check that the Social Services pay the amount that is written in the decision. You may be obliged to pay back the money if the Social Services made a mistake that you should have noticed.

## **Children and adolescents**

### **Helping children grow up in a favourable Environment**

One of the most important duties of the Social Services is to help provide children and adolescents with a safe, healthy environment to grow up in. Special attention should be paid to children who show signs of negative development.

### **Promoting the child's best interests**

The UN Convention on the Rights of Children, which Sweden has signed, states that all decisions about children should be based on an assessment of what is best for the child. All individuals up to the age of 18 are regarded as children. Decisions about children must be made from the child's perspective. This means that adults must listen to the child's opinions and consider the child's overall living situation.

In order to determine what is best for the child, the welfare officer must talk to the child involved in the case and find out his/ her views. The Social Services should then consider the wishes of the child, taking into account the child's age and maturity. This is often a difficult task that requires great care, time and sensitivity. Children must never be pressurised into making decisions when difficult choices are involved.

The child's best interests should always be ascertained, documented and considered in the general evaluation that provides the basis for the Social Services. decision regarding appropriate measures.

### **Help for parents**

If you are a parent and require support and guidance in your parental role, you can apply for help from the Social Services. After the Social Services receive your application, they will perform an investigation to determine whether you are entitled to assistance. You may also be offered help without an investigation, for instance through counselling and support sessions, which are currently provided by family centres and parental advice organisations in many municipalities.

### **Informing the Social Services of children in need of protection**

The Social Services are responsible for providing children and adolescents in difficult situations with the support and protection they need. In order to carry out this responsibility, the Social Services need to be informed if a child or adolescent requires help.

The Social Services Act states that anyone who suspects that a child needs the protection that the Social Welfare Committee (*socialnämnden*) can provide *must* report this to the Social Welfare Committee. All adults in society are urged to stand up for their convictions and inform the Social Services of children and adolescents who may need help or protection. Anyone who makes such a report to the Social Services without giving their name has the right to remain anonymous.

## **Which individuals have a duty to report?**

Certain authorities and their staff, for instance schools and health care services, have a duty to immediately report to the Social Services if, in the course of their work, they have reason to suspect that a child or adolescent is in need of the protection of the Social Services. This duty to report applies to authorities who work with children and adolescents, and other authorities in the health and care sectors and the Social Services. The duty to report also applies to similar independently run organisations.

The Social Services should be notified even if there is only a *suspicion* that a child needs protection. People with a duty to report need not check that the child definitely needs protection before making the report to the Social Services. It is the duty of the Social Services to investigate whether a child or adolescent needs help from the Social Services.

For this reason, authorities who have a duty to report are also obliged to supply any information that may be relevant to the Social Services evaluation of a child's or adolescent's need for assistance. People who have a duty to report and supply information also have a duty to appear as witnesses in court in certain cases regarding children.

The duty to report overrides the confidentiality rule that normally applies between authorities. The need to give vulnerable children and adolescents the help and protection they need is considered more important than the need for confidentiality between authorities.

## **Investigation of the child's situation**

An investigation of the child's needs is initiated after you have *applied* for assistance. An investigation may also be initiated if someone has *reported* to the Social Services that a child may not be getting his or her needs met in the home.

The investigation must begin *immediately* after the application or report is received, and must be completed within a maximum of four months. However, the Social Services may decide to extend this deadline if there are special grounds for this. For instance, the Social Services may be waiting for a statement from a doctor or psychologist, or for the outcome of a police investigation.

If you are to be involved in an investigation, you should be informed of this as soon as the Social Services begin the investigation. You should be provided with information on the investigation procedure, the rules regarding child investigations and your right to retain legal aid during the investigation. During the investigation, all possible efforts should be made to avoid causing unnecessary problems for you and other family members. During an investigation, the Social Services may get in touch with experts, authorities or individuals whose help is considered necessary in evaluating the child's need for assistance, even if you do not agree to this.

## **An investigation must be completed even if a child moves**

If you and your child move from your home municipality during an investigation, the investigation may not be closed or suspended. The Social Services must complete the investigation and determine the measures necessary for your child. An exception is made to this rule if the municipality that you move to agrees to assume the responsibility for completing the investigation.



## **Assistance in the form of advice and support**

Once the investigation is completed, you and your family may be offered a variety of support initiatives. For instance, you could be assigned a contact family who can ease your parental burden by taking care of your child on certain weekends. Or you could be assigned a contact person or personal helper who comes to your home to help you with your parental duties.

## **Transfer to an alternative (foster) home**

When a parent is unable to care for a child at home for some reason, the child may be placed in a family care home or institution. Before making this decision, the Social Services should always check first whether the child can be taken care of by a relative or other person close to the child.

If your child is placed in an alternative home, the Social Services are responsible for ensuring that the child receives good care. For instance, the Social Services must provide support to you, your child and your family to help you keep in touch with each other and continue your relationship even if the child is living in a new home.

If a parent disagrees with the Social Services' decision to move the child, and the Social Services feel that this measure is necessary in order to meet the child's needs, the Social Services may apply to the County Administrative Court to approve the transfer under the Act on Care of Young Persons (*lagen om vård av unga, LVU*).

If your child is moved to an alternative home, you are responsible, as the child's guardian, to contribute to the costs of moving the child.

## **The Social Services must always make a care plan when a child is moved to an alternative home**

Often, being moved to a new home, means a major upheaval both for the child and the child's family. In moving a child to a new home, the Social Services assumes an enormous responsibility for the child. To further highlight the responsibility of the Social Services in this situation, a new regulation was introduced to the Social Services Act from 1 January 2002. According to regulation, the Social Services must always draw up a *care plan* when children are moved to alternative homes.

To ensure that your child receives good care, a general care plan should be drawn up stating the child's needs, the aims of the measures decided on, and the parties responsible for implementing them. The care plan should always be supplemented with a *treatment plan* that indicates in practical terms *how* the initiatives should be implemented.

The care plan tells you about the Social Services, evaluation of the child's needs, and the reason for transferring the child. The care plan provides the basis for the collaboration between the Social Services, you and your family, and other authorities. For this reason, the care plan should also report the planned measures of other authorities. The care plan is also necessary in order for the Social Services to follow up the results of the care provided, in Collaboration with you and your family.

The care plan should be signed by you, by your child if he or she is over 15, by the new guardian, and by the Social Services. This means that everyone who has signed the plan knows what each person

concerned is expected to contribute.

### **Special responsibility in connection with a change of custody, accommodation and social contacts**

When a child's parents do not live together, the Social Services have a duty to provide support and assistance to both the child and the parents in issues regarding custody, accommodation and social contacts. If these matters have been determined in court due to a dispute between the parents, the child may have a special need for continued support from the Social Services. The same responsibility applies in the case of children who move to a family care home. The Social Services also have a special responsibility to meet any specific support and help requirements that adopted children may have while growing up.

### **People with alcohol and drug problems**

#### **General information**

The Social Services have a duty to prevent and combat the abuse of alcohol and other addictive substances. The Social Services also have a duty to inform people of the risks of alcohol and drug abuse, and of the help available, by means of outreach services and providing information.

#### **Assistance and care**

The Social Services have a long-term responsibility to support people with drug and alcohol problems. For instance, the Social Services should actively seek contact with substance abusers to encourage them to initiate care or treatment.

The Social Services are responsible for ensuring that alcohol and drug abusers get the support and help they need in order to break their addiction. The Social Services and the drug abuser should collaborate in planning the type of care and other initiatives required. The Social Services should also carefully check that the plan is followed.

The types of assistance that drug and alcohol abusers can apply for include:

- ☐ support and treatment evaluations
- ☐ a contact person
- ☐ daytime group treatment including training/occupational activities and therapy
- ☐ short-term accommodation or sheltered accommodation
- ☐ care and treatment in an institution
- ☐ transfer to a family care home.

The care and treatment provided by the Social Services is free of charge. However, the Social Services may charge you a fee if you spend time in an institution or family care home. This fee is the same as the daily fee you would pay for staying at a hospital.

If you apply for assistance and your application is refused, you may appeal this decision through an administrative appeal. You can read more about your right to appeal.

If a person's life and health is in serious danger due to a drug or alcohol addiction, and that person does not agree to receive treatment, the Social Services may apply to the County Administrative Court for

compulsory treatment under the Care of Alcohol and Drug Abusers Special Provisions Act (*lagen om vård av missbrukare i vissa fall, LVM*). In short, this means that the addict can be taken into care against his or her will.

## **Elderly people**

### **National goals for elder care**

According to the national for elder care, the municipal authorities have a duty to ensure that elderly people:

- ☐ can live an active life and exercise influence in society and over their everyday life
- ☐ can maintain security and independence as they grow older
- ☐ are treated with respect
- ☐ have access to quality care.

To achieve these aims, the Social Services should provide elderly people with outreach services, and inform them of their rights and opportunities to receive care that is adapted to their individual needs and preferences. The Social Services must provide services that will enable elderly people to continue living in their home environment, or, if this is no longer possible, offer them sheltered housing with service and care facilities, e.g. service accommodation, elderly homes, group accommodation or nursing homes.

### **Assistance for the elderly**

You can apply to receive *home help services*, both for practical assistance and for personal care. Practical assistance may include household duties such as cleaning and laundry, shopping, bank and post office errands, and help with cooking or the delivery of ready-cooked meals.

Personal care may include help with eating and drinking, getting dressed and moving around, and personal hygiene. It may also include measures to prevent isolation or help you feel safe and secure in your home. Home help services may also include the assignment of a companion. If you are cared for by a relative, he or she may apply for support and part-time assistance.

You can also apply to participate in day care services to make it easier for you to continue living at home, or to stay in temporary accommodation, when necessary. If you have extensive care requirements and have difficulty living in your own home with home help services, you may apply to move to *sheltered housing* such as service accommodation, a home for the elderly, group accommodation, or a nursing home. If your application is refused, you have the right to appeal the decision through an administrative appeal.

### **The right for elderly, ill and disabled individuals to move**

If you are elderly, seriously ill or functionally disabled and have extensive care requirements, and you wish to move to another municipality, you can apply for assistance from the municipality you wish to move to. The municipality that processes your application may not take into account your possibilities of getting your needs met in the municipality where you are living at the time of the application. If your application for assistance is rejected by the municipality you wish to move to, you can appeal this

decision through an administrative appeal.

### **No adjustments due to financial situation**

According to the declared legislative intent of the new Social Services Act, the Social Services may not take individual financial situation into account when assessing an elderly or functionally disabled individual's requirement for assistance. Even if you have the financial means to pay for certain home help services, such as cleaning, the municipal authorities must provide such services if you need them. However, you may be charged a fee for these services. You can read more about fees for elderly and disabled care below.

### **Fees for elder and disabled care**

On 1 July 2002, a new fee system was introduced for elder and disabled care. The purpose of the new system is to protect the individual from excessively high costs for municipal care (maximum rate or high cost insurance), and to ensure that all individuals have a minimum sum for living expenses once all fees are paid, known as a reserve sum (*förbehållsbelopp*).

### **Fees**

The highest fee the municipal authorities may charge for home help services, care in sheltered accommodation, day care services and municipal health care services is 1,516 SEK per month. If you live in a shared room in sheltered accommodation, your rent may not exceed 1,579 SEK per month. From 1 July 2002, these two fees are subject to the high cost limit or maximum rate for elder and disabled care.

The fees you must pay are based on the national insurance base amount, and for this reason, they may fluctuate.

### **Reserve sum**

From 1 July 2002, the reserve sum is 4,087 SEK per month for single people and 3,424 per person for married or common-law spouses living together. The reserve sum should cover your household expenses for food, clothes and shoes, leisure activities, hygiene, consumable goods, daily newspapers, telephone costs, television licenses, furniture and home appliances, home insurance, household electricity, travel, dental care, outpatient medical and health care and medicines. The reserve sum does not cover costs for municipal care, support and services, or rent.

Recurring additional costs due to your functional disability may be added to the reserve sum, unless these costs are covered by disability allowance from the National Insurance Office (*Försäkringskassan*). The reserve sum may be reduced if the fee for home help services includes food at a day care centre, or if the fee for accommodation also includes other costs that should be covered by the reserve sum.

### **Your right to appeal the fee**

If you do not agree with the Social Services. decision regarding your fee, or with the calculation of the

reserve sum, you can appeal the decision at the County Administrative Court.

## **People with functional disabilities**

### **Outreach services and information**

The Social Services have a special duty to operate services and investigate the living situation of functionally disabled individuals. The Social Services should draw up disabled plans on the basis of these evaluations. The aim of this is to enable people with physical, psychological or other functional disabilities to actively participate in the community and lead a normal life. The Social Services also have a duty to keep individuals informed of the services they are entitled to under the Social Services Act and the Act on Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (*lagen om stöd och service till funktionshindrade, LSS*).

### **Services for functionally disabled individuals**

The Social Services have special responsibilities towards people who have significant difficulties in their daily life due to physical or psychological functional disabilities. This responsibility primarily applies to people under 65 years of age and people whose functional disability is not age-related.

The Social Services should help ensure that your accommodation is adapted to your specific needs, for instance by providing special service accommodation. The Social Services should also help provide you with a meaningful occupation.

The services available to functionally disabled individuals include:

- ☐ *pecially adapted apartments* with support facilities, such as home help services or personal assistance
- ☐ *group accommodation or an apartment in a special housing complex*, for individuals who want and need to have staff available 24 hours a day.
- ☐ *home help services* or home-based assistance in the form of service, practical assistance or personal care
- ☐ *a companion* to assist with recreational activities and outings, shopping or social contacts
- ☐ *support/ part-time assistance* in the home or in *temporary accommodation*, for functionally disabled individuals cared for by relatives
- ☐ *occupational* or other activities for individuals who are free in the daytime due to functional disability
- ☐ *a contact person* for individuals who need social contact.

Applications for assistance are evaluated individually. This means that the Social Services assess your individual need of support in order to lead a normal life with a suitable standard of living. This assessment should take into account your access to assistance from others, how many people of your age group you live with, and whether your need for assistance is temporary or permanent. Other factors that may determine the services you are allocated are whether your service requirements are expected to last for many years, and whether you require practical assistance in order to look after your children or continue living in your home.

## **People caring for relatives**

Today, most elderly, ill or functionally disabled individuals are cared for by relatives. The Social Services should support the relatives providing this care. The Social Services can provide various forms of support for people caring for relatives. For instance, the person you are caring for might spend time in temporary accommodation, on either an occasional or regular basis (known as alternating care). Other forms of assistance include home help or day care services at regular times, part-time assistance and recuperation breaks for care-providing relatives. The caregiver relative might also participate in group activities for people caring for relatives with dementia conditions, disabilities etc.

The Social Services may also provide financial assistance to people caring for relatives.

## **Crime victims and their relatives**

The Social Services have a duty to assist and support crime victims, and should conduct active work in this area. The relatives of crime victims, whether children or adults, may also need support and assistance. The regulation regarding support and assistance for crime victims and their relatives took effect on 1 July 2001.

Women who are or have been subjected to physical or mental violence in the home may need special support and assistance to change their situation. Children who have experienced violence between their parents are a particularly vulnerable group that require support and assistance. The Social Services should provide support to crime victims and their relatives in close collaboration with other authorities.

## **Supervision of the Social Services**

The supervision of the Social Services is aimed at ensuring that the Social Services monitor the quality of and strive to improve their activities with regard to individuals, legal rights and the quality and legal correctness of the services provided. Sweden's National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*) and County Administrative Boards (*Länsstyrelser*) have a joint duty to supervise the work of the municipal Social Services. The County Administrative Board is responsible for routine inspection at county level.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has general responsibility at a national level, but neither the National Board of Health and Welfare nor any other body has the right to contest the supervisory decisions of the County Administrative Board. The National Board of Health and Welfare and the County Administrative Boards collaborate to strengthen and develop the supervision of the Social Services.

The County Administrative Board supervises both municipally and privately run services. A new provision has been introduced in the Social Services Act, which states that the County Administrative Board has the right to inspect all social service activities in the county, whether they are municipally or independently run. The County Administrative Board has the right to take action against unfair practices, regardless of whether it regards a municipal or independent organisation.

If you are dissatisfied with the assistance you receive, you should begin by contacting the supervisors and public officials responsible for the Social Services. If the service you are dissatisfied with is not municipally operated, you should begin by contacting the management of the service in question. If

you do not get a satisfactory response to your complaint there, you can contact your local County Administrative Board to have your complaints investigated, tried and determined.

### **Lodging a complaint with the Parliamentary Ombudsman**

Individuals who feel they have been wrongly or unfairly treated by a governmental authority can lodge a complaint with the Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman (*justitieombudsmannen - JO*).

Anyone has the right to lodge a complaint. If you lodge a complaint with the Parliamentary Ombudsman, you should do so within two years of the time the Social Services processed your case. The Parliamentary Ombudsman investigates whether authorities and individual officials follow the prevailing laws and regulations.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman may criticise an official or authority, but does not have the right to change a decision or judgement. If a party has committed illegal conduct, the Parliamentary Ombudsman may bring proceedings for breach of duty or other offences committed during work. The Parliamentary Ombudsman also examines cases on his or her own initiative, and regularly inspects various authorities.

### **Further information**

If you require any information that is not included in this publication, you can contact the Social Services in your home municipality. You will find a list of addresses and telephone numbers in the telephone directory on the pages dealing with *Information for citizens*. These pages are marked with a green border. The Social Services may be referred to by various names depending on the municipality, for instance *Socialförvaltningen*, *Socialtjänsten*, *Vård och omsorg*, *Social service* or *Socialkontor*. If you live in a large municipality, you may also find the Social Services under the District Council (*stadsdelsnämnd*) or Municipal District Board (*kommundelsnämnd*) of your home municipality.

If you would like to read the provisions of the Social Services Act, you can find them on the Internet at the following address: [www.lagrummet.gov.se](http://www.lagrummet.gov.se) (Social Services Act (*Socialtjänstlag*), SFS 2001:453). You can also contact your municipal authorities to read the Act.